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**Tuesday, February 20, 2018**

## Fixing a Broken System

POSTED BY KIMBERLY WEAR

ON TUE, FEB 20, 2018 AT 6:04 PM

The Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Services and Sheriff's Office have agreed to a series of overhauls after a California Attorney General's Office investigation found serious lapses in the local child abuse reporting system.

Under the stipulated judgement accepted by a judge last week, DHHS' Child Welfare Services and the sheriff's office are required to make what the attorney general's office described as "extensive corrective measures across multiple government agencies to ensure that every report of child abuse and neglect is investigated by one or both agencies in a timely manner."

Those include setting up a 24/7 emergency phone line screened by social workers to take calls of suspected neglect and abuse, ensuring timely cross reporting among agencies, establishing a community task force and the development and implementation of a joint tracking system.

Additionally, CWS is to revise its policies and procedures to "ensure collaboration with and input relating to decision making from tribes."

The judgement notes that DHHS and the sheriff's office worked cooperatively with the attorney general's office and "have affirmed their commitment to make meaningful changes to how child abuse and neglect reports are handled in


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Xavier Becerra

### about the author



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#### Bio:

Kimberly Wear is the assistant editor of the *North Coast Journal*.

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Humboldt County.”

“The institutions of Humboldt County entrusted to protect children failed them,” Attorney General Xavier Becerra said in a statement. “What can be more important than public agencies performing their duties to safeguard the security and welfare of our kids? We owe it to our children to enforce these laws vigorously. This stipulated judgment will keep the spotlight on Humboldt County’s implementation of system-wide reforms to protect children from abuse and neglect.”

According to court documents, the attorney general’s investigation launched in 2015 found both agencies put children’s well-being at risk by either failing to follow up on neglect and abuse reports or not conducting investigations in a timely manner as required under California’s Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act and state welfare code.

That included the lack of a 24/7 emergency response system for CWS social workers to take calls — the main way abuse and neglect reports are made — with mandated reporters like teachers, as well as concerned citizens, forced to leave messages and often not receiving calls back for “days, weeks, or months, if at all,” court documents filed by the attorney general’s office state.

The court documents also state that “there were occasions when deputies did not respond to community calls for assistance or complete case reports” because the sheriff’s office did not have policies and procedures in place, and that CWS “did not investigate referrals in a timely manner.”

For example, the investigation found that in 2015 CWS “only made timely first face-to-face contact within the 10-day statutory period 64 percent of the time” and took an average of 97 days to complete an investigation, exceeding the mandatory 30-day requirement.

“From 2010 to 2015, more than half of all screen-in referrals took 63 days or more to close, with a number of referrals that were left open for years,” the court documents state.

The two agencies also did not have a cooperative agreement for handling reports or sharing information, which was mainly done via fax but only monitored during business hours with CWS routinely sending cross reports from the entire week to the sheriff’s office late Friday afternoon.

Under the stipulated judgment, DHHS and the sheriff’s office have set time frames for addressing those lapses and others and are required to retain a third-party monitor to ensure compliance.

Humboldt County Sheriff William Honsal said in a release that the process has strengthened his office’s “communication and teamwork” with CWS, noting that “protecting the children of the county is the highest priority.”

“Our new communications system and joint response protocol will ensure that mandated reports of child abuse and neglect are quickly investigated and that children are protected,” he said.

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DHHS Director Connie Beck said the agreement builds on efforts that were already underway to modernize the CWS system.

“Staff inherited an inefficient paper-and-pencil system that they’ve had to work with for many years. I’m grateful for their commitment to systems improvement and, ultimately, to the children and families we serve,” she said.

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Please forward this comment to General Becerra with the gravest urgency! My name is TST and I have been employed for 5 years in CPS in Mendocino County, just south of Humboldt. This article about that county has been fascinating because I was not aware that other counties have allowed their CPS system to deteriorate so much. I have been an investigator for CPS for 20 years and I was recently demoted for trying to report malfeasance and direct violations of federal and state law as well as county policies. I testified under oath for a 2015 Grand Jury report on the agency that found many of the same issues going on here as in Humboldt that make the children in this county inherently unsafe. This GJ report, as well as, a 2017 follow up GJ report on HHSA here is available on the Mendocino County website.

Issues such as chronic understaffing that management makes no effort to rectify. This leaves every ER investigative worker here with over 100 open referrals at a time and not seeing the alleged child victims for weeks or months and sometimes not at all. Then, they often call a client over one year later to have them submit to a year old investigation because no documentation was ever put into the CMS system so the file cannot be closed. This is illegal under the WIC Code. This re-traumatizes children by putting them through the same invasive interview twice. They leave referrals open in CMS with no documentation or SDM tools for up to two years even after new reports are called in on the same families. I could continue but this comment is getting long enough.

However, I am begging for the AG's office to conduct an investigation, similar to the one they completed in Humboldt County, because this is truly the only way that management here is going to be held accountable for placing children's lives at risk due to lackadaisical and downright corrupt leadership, which causes severe morale problems. They are very retaliatory with anyone revealing their secrets, which is my current situation. I will probably be fired for making this comment. It is much more important that I can leave CPS work after over two decades believing the children of Mendocino County are safe from the numerous parents with severe drug problems (Emerald Triangle is not just pot) and many with untreated mental illness and substance abuse.

Many of these adults are raising children, some in the same home where they are manufacturing highly explosive "Honey Oil." Please contact me at TT760@protonmail.com for much more information on this situation. I will be contacting the AG's office directly but I was hoping that you would also forward this message. I'm including a link to a recent local newspaper article that partially details the situation I've been discussing. The children here really need your help. Some will die or be seriously injured and in fact already have due to the agency's systemic failures that have continued for the past six years. I will find another job.

Thanks,

Timothy Turner  
Former CPS ER Supervisor

Twenty Year CPS Investigator

<http://theava.com/archives/78951>

report



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